



Gardasil, An HPV Vaccine for Women

Gardasil is a new vaccine which has been approved by the FDA to help prevent cervical cancer and genital warts in females.

HPV Facts:

HPV is a sexually transmitted disease that causes genital warts, abnormal Pap tests, and cervical cancer.

- About 20 million people are infected with HPV in the United States and almost 3,700 women die of cervical cancer in the US each year.
- Since many people have no symptoms and do not even know that they are infected with HPV, they can pass on their HPV infection to their sexual partners without knowing.

Gardasil Facts:

Gardasil protects against two 'high risk' types of HPV which cause 70% of abnormal Pap tests and 70% of cervical cancers. Gardasil does not protect against the less common strains of HPV that cause the other 30% of abnormal Pap tests and cervical cancers.

Gardasil does not protect against the two high risk types of HPV if you have already been exposed to them and carry them. If you carry one, it would still protect you from the other.

Because Gardasil does not protect against all HPV and does not protect against HPV you may already have, Gardasil does not, and will not eliminate the need for Pap tests. It will simply markedly reduce the chance that your Pap test will ever be abnormal, or that you will ever get cervical cancer.

Gardasil protects against the two 'low risk' types of HPV which cause 90% of genital warts.

- Gardasil is given as a three dose series completed over 6 months.

For whom is Gardasil recommended?

Since Gardasil prevents HPV, a sexually transmitted disease, it is best that it be given early, ideally before people become sexually active. The Center for Disease Control, Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends that Gardasil be routinely given to girls when they are 11 or 12 years of age. Gardasil can be started as early as age 9 and can also be given to women 13 to 26 years old.

Gardasil Concerns:

Some experts fear that women who have received the vaccine will falsely assume they no longer need annual Pap tests. Other experts are concerned that parents may have problems thinking about giving a vaccine against an STD to pre-teens. This must be weighed against their desire to give the child long-term protection. Some think that Gardasil might encourage promiscuity, because a teen might believe that she is protected against all STDs. Clearly, discussion with the teen about the vaccine's purposes, and what it will not do, will be required.

To learn more about Gardasil and other ways of protecting yourself and your children, contact your pediatrician or your gynecologist.

Michael J. Seeber, DO FACOOG